

A RAND NOTE

THE SOVIET UNION AND MUSLIM GUERRILLA WARS,
1920-1981: LESSONS FOR AFGHANISTAN

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PREFACE

This Note documents a lecture originally given to the Social Science Department of The Rand Corporation in March 1981. It presents an historical analogy that explains, to a large degree, the apparent inability of the Soviet-backed Afghan regimes to defeat the Afghan resistance movements and to govern the population in the wake of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979. The author contrasts former Soviet successes with current failures in dealing with insurgent Muslim movements and suggests lessons from past experience for contemporary Afghanistan.

The Note should be of interest to students of Soviet foreign policy, military planners, and members of the intelligence community.

SUMMARY

The leaders of the Soviet Union, and through them their clients at the helm of the government in Afghanistan, possess deep and varied experience in dealing with Muslim guerrilla insurgencies. Pre-Soviet involvement dates back to the bloody Caucasian wars of the nineteenth century against the Naqshebandi order, the Andizhan uprisings in the Ferghana Valley in 1896, and the Kazakh revolt of 1916. The Soviets subsequently participated in extended conflicts against the Basmachi movement in Central Asia and Muslim mountaineers in the North Caucasus during the 1920s, the fight against the Muslim national Communists from 1923 to 1936, and two interventions in Muslim countries abroad--Ghilan in 1920-21 and Azerbaidzhan and Kurdistan in 1945-46. Thus, the Soviet regime is not without a collective "know-how" concerning the conduct of a successful revolution in a pre-capitalist Muslim country.

Many opportunities for applying this knowledge to the conflict in Afghanistan were denied the Soviet leadership due to the rapidly changing strategic environment and the precipitate actions of the successive Afghan governments after 1978. At other times, Soviet leaders have simply failed to heed the advice of their own history, which has shown the following formulae for dealing with Muslim guerrilla uprisings to be successful: (1) divide the adversary, using ethnic or religious levers where possible; (2) win over critical native elites, especially the tribal nobility, the traditional religious leadership, and the modern intellectual class; (3) create a strong local Communist Party apparatus; (4) field a Muslim national army; and (5) create a

national Communist ideology that takes the most appropriate elements of Marxism-Leninism, synthesizes them with local reality, and portrays itself as a conquering ideology.

For a variety of reasons, the Soviets and their Afghan client governments have been unable to realize any of these points. Rather, because of ignorance of local conditions, a political-military environment that defies control, and the preemptive actions of the Muslim guerrillas, most efforts by the Soviet and Afghan governments have ended in lessened prestige and authority for the Communists and heightened power and popularity for the insurgents.

Success or failure of Soviet activity in Afghanistan depends on a number of factors, including Pakistan's policy, the extent of external support for the Mujahidin, the extent to which the Soviets are capable of exploiting internal weaknesses among the insurgents, and efforts to establish a stable government in Kabul that commands the respect of the population. In addition, the Soviets must create as rapidly as possible a disciplined, unified, and dedicated Communist Party apparatus whose effectiveness extends well beyond the major cities. An acceptable theory of Afghan national Communism must be developed and made to look appealing, and a competent Afghan army must be built and put into the field.

Finally, Soviet military intervention must be brought to a rapid and complete end, for no Soviet-supported Afghan government is likely to win the loyalty of the Afghan population while Soviet troops continue to plunder the countryside and exact a terrible toll in human life.

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I. INTRODUCTION

With the Civil War not yet over, General Wrangel still in the Crimea threatening Kuban, war with Poland imminent, and the Russian empire ruined and exhausted by five years of foreign and civil war, the Bolshevik regime found itself in 1920 faced with two exceedingly violent and effective Muslim guerrilla movements in different parts of the new Soviet state. In Central Asia, the Basmachi¹--a name that has achieved generic status in Soviet parlance--practiced hit-and-run tactics and exacted a frightful toll against all manner of authority, especially against the Russian colons who saw the coming of the Bolsheviks as support for their colonial gains at the expense of the native inhabitants. In the North Caucasus, the two leaders (murshid) of the Naqshebandi Sufi brotherhood, Imam Najmudin of Gotzo, and Sheikh Uzun Haji of Salty, declared a holy war (jihad) against the Soviet regime and

¹ The term Basmachi comes from the Uzbek word basmach, meaning bandit. The Basmachi resistance was a rural-based guerrilla movement that sprang up in the Ferghana Valley immediately following the destruction of Kokand by Russian troops of the Tashkent Soviet. After a brief lull in the fighting, in 1920, stimulated by some positive measures by Soviet authorities, the rebellion flared up again and in 1921 spread to the eastern part of the Emirate of Bukhara (the southern regions of today's Uzbekistan and western Tadzhikistan) and later to the Turkmen area of Khorezm. In 1922, Ahmed Zeki Velidi (Togan) and Enver Pasha joined the rebels and tried unsuccessfully to unify them. By 1923, the back of the movement had been broken in Ferghana, but fighting went on intermittently until 1928 in the mountains of southern Bukhara and until at least 1936 in the Turkmen steppes. The Basmachi were never a united front; each local commander was fighting his own war. Some of them were adepts of a Sufi brotherhood, others were traditional tribal leaders, and some were authentic highway bandits. The Basmachi had no political program except to throw the Russians out. Their movement never received help from abroad, although in 1924 they temporarily used Afghan and Iranian territory for sanctuary.

the Russian presence in the Caucasus more generally.² There, too, human costs were appalling for both sides. Lenin and the Bolshevik leadership saw these Muslim guerrilla uprisings as real dangers to the safety of the regime itself, and they dealt with the situation accordingly. To fight the Basmachi, Lenin dispatched the best Soviet Army, the VIth, under his best military commander, Marshall Mikhail Frunze. Against the Caucasian mountaineers, the Bolsheviks arrayed the entire XIth Army.³

Indeed, in the fight with the Basmachi and Caucasian rebels, the Soviets should have gained rich experience in dealing with Muslim guerrilla insurgencies. Moreover, while the struggles in Central Asia and the Caucasus were poignant and traumatic for Soviet regimes, they by no means constitute the entire body of learning. To them could be added several other pre- and post-revolutionary events which contribute to and underline the lessons from Central Asia and the Caucasus: the Caucasian wars of the nineteenth century against the same Naqshebandi order; the

² Before 1920, the same brotherhood fought General Denikin. This movement was united by the ideology of jihad and the desire to re-establish Imam Shamil's theocratic state. The murids were never able to occupy the Daghestani lowlands and never received help from abroad. The war lasted until 1921 and was unusually bloody, the last pockets of resistance finally being eliminated in 1923. Najmuddin of Gotzo was captured and executed; Uzun Haji, then 90 years old, died during the fighting.

³ Thinking ahead to the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, one is struck by the apparently misplaced belief of Soviet authorities that the challenge of the Afghan resistance movements would constitute at best a marginal danger. While no one would suggest that the Afghan tribesmen have the same capacity as the Muslim guerrilla movements of sixty years earlier to undermine the very foundations of Soviet power, it remains difficult to explain why the Soviets appear to have misread the Afghan potential to inflict significant material and human costs on an overwhelmingly more powerful adversary. It is almost as if the Soviets, whose view of progress is based on the ineluctable unfolding of history, failed to grasp the meaning of specific parts of their own historical evolution to date, leaving themselves at least partially out of synchronization with the continuing process.

Andizhan uprising in 1896 in the Ferghana Valley led by Central Asian Naqshebandis; the revolt of the Kazakh tribes in 1916; two interventions in Muslim countries abroad--Ghilan in 1920-21 and Iranian Azerbaidzhan and Kurdistan in 1945-46; the long struggle against the Muslim National Communists at home from 1923-36; and the North Caucasian Chechen uprising in 1942-43.

The sum of these different experiences should constitute a "know-how"--a collection of "recipes" on how to conduct and win a war against Muslim guerrillas and to make a successful socialist revolution in a traditional Muslim milieu. In this regard, some experiences in the Russian past are positive, indicating "what should be done"; others are negative, suggesting "what should be avoided." The struggle against the Basmachi falls into the former category, the simultaneous Caucasian war into the latter.

For various reasons, this collective and costly body of knowledge either was not applied to the current situation in Afghanistan or it was applied only marginally, with little or paradoxical effect. The rapidly changing strategic environment in Afghanistan from the ascent of Nur Mohammed Taraki in 1978 until the Soviet invasion in December 1979--allowing for nearly two years of local Communist rule--probably contributed to Soviet uncertainty about which historical formulae to apply. But this uncertainty was compounded by the ignorance of the Soviet leadership of real conditions in Afghanistan. Since the death of Reisner, the best pre-World War II Soviet Afghanistan expert, no comparable or even commendable Soviet specialists on Afghan affairs have emerged. (One might compare this deficiency with the rise of the

brilliant team of Soviet Iranian experts led by Petrushevskii.) As we shall see, a shifting strategic environment, made more inscrutable by official ignorance and an unwillingness to learn from history, coalesced to produce missed opportunities of critical import, opportunities which, properly exploited, might have offered the Soviets a better chance for success. From their past confrontations with Muslim guerrilla movements, the Soviets should have learned at least five fundamental lessons, and they should have sought to implement these pieces of historical wisdom in their dealings with the Afghans. The lessons are: (1) divide the adversary; (2) win over crucial native groups; (3) create a strong indigenous Communist Party apparatus; (4) field a Muslim national army; and (5) create an Afghan national Communism.

II. DIVIDE THE ADVERSARY

For Russians, there is nothing new in opposing different ethnic, social, and religious groups in complex multiethnic and multireligious societies against one another, supporting the weakest against the strongest. Indeed, they applied this tactic with great success in the Caucasian wars of the nineteenth century when Tsarist authorities supported the Kabardians and the Kumyks against the Avars and the Chechens,¹ the Christian Ossetians (the Iron tribes) against Muslim Ossetians (the Digor tribes), Christian Armenians against Muslim Azerbaidzhanis, and so on. Learning from this experience, the Bolsheviks in 1918 favored the Bashkirs over the stronger and more dynamic Tatars. In 1920, in the North Caucasus, they supported the Darghins against the Avars and the Ingush against the Chechen.² During the Civil War in Kazakhstan, the Soviets succeeded in winning over some of the nomadic tribes and turning them against the others. In the Khorezm oasis, the traditional hostility of the sedentary population (Uzbeks and Karakalpaks) was played against the nomadic Turkmen. Moreover, the Soviets successfully orchestrated the neutrality of Ferghana Valley's city dwellers (Uzbeks and Tadzhiks), thereby denying

¹ Kabardian and Kumyk feudal lords were accepted into the Russian nobility with equal rank and privileges and became loyal to the Tsarist regime. The Avar feudal classes were almost totally liquidated by Sham-il.

² The opposition of the Darghins of central Daghestan to the Avars of northern Daghestan, who formed the backbone of the 1920 uprising, was so pronounced that the Naqshebandi Sheikh Ali of Akusha, the spiritual leader of the Darghins, sided with the Bolsheviks. He remained a staunch supporter of the Communist regime until 1928, when he was liquidated by Stalin.

their support to the peasants and nomads of the region (mostly Uzbeks and Kirghiz) who formed the backbone of the Basmachi movement.

For those skilled in tactics of this kind, as the Russians assuredly were, Afghanistan should have appeared as the ideal environment in which to mount a similar game of divide et impera. There is no Afghan nation, only a state composed of many ethnic groups with no historical or current evidence of national cohesiveness. In Afghanistan, the ethnic mosaic turns on a complicated social hierarchy with the Pushtuns at the top, followed in order by the Tadjiks, the Nuristanis, various Turkic peoples (Uzbeks, Turkmen, Kirghiz), the Baluchis, and, at the bottom, the Hazaras. In theory at least, the possibility exists to oppose these ethnic groups to one another or, somewhat more involved but no less effective, to oppose Pushtun tribes to one another, Shiite Muslims to Sunni Muslims, Ismailis to both Shiites and Sunnis, and city dwellers to peasants and tribes, to mention just a few of the possible combinations. But, caught in a fluid strategic environment and unschooled in local ethnic politics, the Soviets were unable to devise and implement a systematic strategy for dividing their elusive adversaries.

The Soviet-supported Afghan regimes in Kabul proved equally unable to implement such a tactic, and their few attempts to capture the advantage ended counterproductively.³ In large part, this failure is due to the heavy Pushtun and Tadjik representation in the Khalq and Parcham factions, respectively, of the Afghan People's Democratic Party. Nur

³ In 1978 and 1979, the government in Kabul supported the Sufi Pushtun tribe of the Kunar Valley against the weaker Shiite Hazaras of Bamiyan.

Mohammed Taraki tried cautiously, but with no great success, to grant favors to the Hazaras and to the Uzbeks in order to swing crucial support to him and his policies. His successor, Amin, followed a purely Pushtun line. The current government of Babrak Karmal is dominated by Pushtuns and thus faces the same impediments to expanding its power base. There is some evidence, however, that Babrak Karmal recently has made tentative overtures to the Nuristanis and the Hazaras.⁴ More recently still, Babrak's faction undertook a more serious effort to court the politically important Turkmen community living in the strategically important northwestern corner of Afghanistan. In a move not unlike the "Soviet model" of the 1920s, the Kabul government established a Turkmen Cultural Committee in January 1981 to "strengthen and improve the Turkmen language and the culture of the Turkmen nations."⁵

Coming this late in the game, Babrak Karmal's tactical outreach, almost certainly on the recommendation of Soviet advisors who have begun to remember their competitive advantage in struggles of this kind, has only a marginal chance of success.

Successful or not, these moves are only belated efforts on a board of greater, but probably not lost, opportunities. For example, all three Afghan Communist leaders--Taraki, Amin, and Karmal--avoided the

⁴ Speaking before the "toiling people of Nuristan," Karmal denounced "our traditional and former enemies who are the same British disguised as Americans, Chinese, and Pakistanis" (Radio Kabul, in Pushto, 1430 GMT, 6 December 1980, Foreign Broadcast Information Service, FBIS-SAS, 80-237, 8 December 1980.) On December 20, 1980, Karmal received a delegation of Hazaras from Bamiyan (Radio Kabul, in Pushto, 1530 GMT, 20 December 1980, FBIS-SAS, 80-246, 23 December 1980.)

⁵ Bakhtar, Kabul, 13 January 1980, in FBIS-SAS, 81-009, 14 January 1981.

Shia-Sunni split that might have been manipulated to their advantage, treating Shiites as dangerous enemies and as "scapegoats," perhaps because of their potential infection by "Khomeinism."⁶ No serious attempt was made to exploit obvious urban-rural contradictions, a ploy that served the Bolsheviks well in the 1920s in Khorezm, Daghestan, and the Ferghana Valley. As a result, the Soviets face opposition from nearly all parts of the multinational-multireligious spectrum. Resistance is well rooted in the cities,⁷ and the exploits of the Afghan mountainmen have been highly publicized. In what could only be a painful irony to doctrinaire Marxist-Leninists, the social classes of Afghan society lack the depth of antagonism to be played off against one another. They are simply insufficiently developed.

⁶ A typical example is the massive arrest of members of the Shiite community of the Jadi Maiwand suburb of Kabul as scapegoats for the anti-Soviet disturbances in Kabul in February 1980 (AFP, 26 February 1980, in FBIS-MEA, 27 February 1980).

⁷ The inability of the Basmachi and of the Daghestani rebels to infiltrate the cities of Ferghana and of the Caspian coastal plain was one of the main reasons for their defeats. As early as 1918, the Bolsheviks took measures to wipe out once and for all any attempts to organize urban resistance: Simferopol in January 1918; the "TransBulak Republic" in Kazan in March 1918; Kokand, where several thousand Muslims were slaughtered by the Russian units of the Tashkent Soviet, in February 1918; and in Baku, where some 3,000 Azeri Muslims were massacred by the troops of the Baku Commune, in March 1918.

III. WIN OVER CRUCIAL NATIVE GROUPS

The Soviets succeeded in Central Asia and the Caucasus in the 1920s in large part because they recognized the necessity of obtaining at least the temporary support of three crucial elements in those societies: the tribal nobility, the religious leadership, and the native intellectual class. Tsarist authorities proved highly skilled at courting and coopting the traditional elite of the newly conquered Muslim territories of the Russian Empire, and the Bolshevik leadership chose the same tactics in the 1920s when it became necessary to win back their colonial patrimony. Like their Tsarist predecessors, the new Soviet leadership under Lenin and Stalin, who served as head of the Peoples' Commissariat of Nationalities (Narkomnats) in the fledgling Soviet government, won quite spectacular triumphs in this regard, ensuring their ultimate victory in Central Asia, the Caucasus, and the Middle Volga. These should have been good lessons for the Soviet takeover of Afghanistan.

THE TRIBAL NOBILITY

The paradoxical courting of the Muslim tribal aristocracy by Bolshevik representatives that took place during the Civil War in Kazakhstan had excellent results. When a Kazakh batyr, a sultan, or a khan sided with the Bolsheviks, his clan, tribe, or horde followed automatically.¹ Such was the case with the important Qypchaq tribe and

¹ In pre-revolutionary Kazakh society, a batyr was head of a clan, a sultan was chief of a tribe, and a khan--always a descendant of Genghis Khan--was the ruler of a horde.

the entire Bukey Horde, whose chieftans, Zhangildin and Ali Khan Bukeykhanov, joined the Russian Communist Party during the Civil War in return for promises of national self-determination which Lenin and his compatriots were never prepared to keep.² In the same way and for the same reasons, Ahmed Zeki Validov, the aristocratic and undisputed Bashkir leader, went over to the Reds, taking his entire nation with him.

There is evidence that the Soviet leadership wished to adopt similar tactics in Afghanistan in 1978 and that they encouraged the Kabul government to move carefully to coopt Afghanistan's tribal elite. For example, the Khan Abdol Ghafar Khan, the venerable, 91-year-old Pushtun leader, was whisked in from India and paraded in Kabul as a friend of the new Taraki government and, by implication, of the USSR. Through persuasion and bribery, the Kabul Minister of Tribal and Frontier Affairs, Lt. Colonel Faiz Mohammed, won over some clans of the Jaji and Mangal tribes of Paktia province. These clans later participated as supplemental forces in the unsuccessful Soviet expedition into the Panjshir Valley in September 1980.

But on the whole, the Soviets, working through the different Afghan regimes, failed to coopt a significant number of critical tribal elites or even to woo them into neutrality. This failure can be attributed to a number of factors, some of which the Soviets never had the ability to control and others of which were created by the unruly Afghan

² Zhangildin was the first Kazakh tribal chief to join the Russian Communist Party, where he became First Secretary. Bukeykhanov, former president of the Kazakh nationalist party, the Alash Orda, joined the Bolsheviks in November 1919 and became a member of the Russian Communist Party (bolshevik) in 1920. He was liquidated by Stalin in 1932.

governments of Taraki and Amin. Three reasons are prominent: First, Taraki and Amin both pursued crude and brutal anti-elitist policies which resulted in the massacre of a great number of tribal chiefs. Babrak Karmal has sought to correct this error but has been unable to define a clear strategy toward the remaining tribal leaders in the wake of the damage caused by Taraki and Amin. Nowhere is this confusion better demonstrated than in the following incident: In February and March 1980, while Karmal labored to persuade the tribal chiefs from Paktia and Qandahar--many of whom he had just released from Amin's jails--to support his government, the Soviet Air force was conducting napalm bombing raids on these same tribes.

Second, where Kazakh, Bashkir, and Turkmen societies traditionally adhere to the direction of strong leaders, Pushtun clans are far more "democratic" and, hence, less susceptible to wholesale cooptation. Power in Pushtun societies is held by jirga (assemblies) of elders, each with a voice, not by a hereditary ruler. Needless to say, it is difficult to obtain any agreement, let alone agreement on such a controversial issue, from an unruly assembly of fiercely independent Pushtuns.

Third, perhaps fearing just such a tactic by the Soviet-inspired Afghan governments, Afghan guerrillas rapidly and unceremoniously liquidated Faiz Mohammad, one of the more successful leaders in Kabul and by far the best informed specialist on Afghan tribal affairs.³ Thus, the Soviets were deprived of what may have been their best chance for

³ AFP, 13 September 1980, in FBIS-SAS, 80-180, 15 September 1980.

securing the assistance or at least the neutrality of this important part of Afghan society.

THE TRADITIONAL RELIGIOUS LEADERSHIP

Another paradoxical Bolshevik success during the Civil War was the cooptation of important Muslim religious leaders. This success contributed immensely to the Bolsheviks' final victory over the Muslim guerrillas of Central Asia, the Basmachi. Contrary to the claims of Soviet anti-religious propaganda of the 1930s--still upheld by Soviet historiography today--Muslim clerics everywhere were not in the vanguard of the counterrevolutionary movement. (Only in Daghestan and Chechna was this the case, a testimony to the cleverness of Soviet tactics.) On the contrary, during this period local Soviet authorities, who often were Muslims themselves, appealed to "progressive" elements among the Muslim clerics. These clerics, who became known as "Red Mullahs," took the lead in attacking more conservative Muslim clerics who opposed the new Soviet regime.⁴ In the balance, the Bolsheviks also managed to

⁴See, for example, Mir Said Sultan Galiev, "Metody anti-religioznoi propagandy sredi musul'man," Zhizn' Natsional'nostei, 14 December 1921 and 23 December 1921; translated in Alexandre A. Bennigsen and S. Enders Wimbush, Muslim National Communism in the Soviet Union: A Revolutionary Strategy for the Colonial World (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979, pp. 145-157). When in March 1918 Russian troops of the Kazan Soviet attacked the TransBulak Republic of the Tatar nationalists in the suburbs of Kazan, they received the armed assistance of the local Sufi brotherhood--a dissident branch of the Naqshebandi, the Vaisov Bozhoi Polk (Vaisov's God Regiment). The fanatical and ultra-conservative adepts of this brotherhood believed that their co-religionists were heretics and therefore more dangerous than the Bolsheviks. The head of the brotherhood, Iman Vaisov, was killed while fighting his fellow Muslims (Chantal Lemerrier Quelquejay, "Le Vaisisme a Kazan: Contribution a l'etude des Confreries musulmanes chez les Tatars de la Volga," Die Welt des Islams, Leiden, 1959, pp. 91-113).

In 1920, in the Chechen-Ingush territory, the local Bolsheviks were successful in obtaining the cooperation of the head of one of the most

secure the neutrality of the prestigious and very conservative Muslim Spiritual Directorate of Ufa.⁵ In spite of his personal abhorrence of "godless Communism," the Mufti of Ufa, Rizaeddin Fahretdin-oglu, refused to give his blessing to the Basmachis. For this profoundly important abstention, the Bolsheviks eventually rewarded the spiritual leader with execution at the hands of the Cheka, but he had served his purpose.

Musa Jarullah Bigi, the greatest of the Tatar jadid (modernist) theologians, also refrained from attacking the Bolshevik regime. Bigi's logic, which was shared by many important Muslim leaders and which certainly was the product of some intense Soviet propaganda, was that in spite of all its errors and mistakes, Communism could coexist with Islam.⁶

Perhaps because so many members of the traditional Muslim establishment felt this way, the Basmachi movement never acquired the character of a jiḥad (religious war). In addition, many Muslim soldiers were fighting with the Red Army against the Muslim rebellion. In fact, from time to time Basmachi leaders agreed to negotiate with Soviet authorities and to cooperate with the Red Army, both unthinkable actions if the Basmachi movement had been a true jiḥad.

In Afghanistan, the Soviets have been unable to draw on this experience to advance their cause. Whether acting on Soviet advice or

conservative Sufi orders of the North Caucasus, Ali Mitaev, the murshid of the Bammāt Giray brotherhood (a branch of the Qadiriya). For a short while (until his arrest and liquidation in 1925), Ali Mitaev was even a member of the Chechen Revolutionary Committee.

⁵ The Muslim Spiritual Directorate of Ufa was founded in 1783 by Catherine II. The conservative muftis who chaired this Directorate were nominated by the Minister of Interior in St. Petersburg. Until 1917 they remained loyal to the Tsarist regime.

⁶ In the 1930s, discouraged by the violence of the anti-religious campaign, Bigi emigrated abroad. He died in Turkey in 1949.

independently--but in either case foolishly--Afghan leaders ushered in the Saur revolution in April 1978 to the accompanying strains of a violent anti-religious campaign. Openly proclaiming their intention of liquidating Islam's hold on the Afghanistan population while building "socialism," both Taraki and Amin engaged in continuous and brutal attacks on Muslim leaders and Islamic institutions. Although Karmal, sensibly, has put a stop to the most blatant expressions of anti-Islamic zeal--his actions have included replacing the red flag of revolution with the green flag of Islam--this legacy will be difficult for any Soviet-backed regime to disavow. Soviet discriminatory treatment of its own Muslims is no secret to the Afghans, many of whom certainly have concluded, rightly or wrongly, that Soviet leaders are behind the whole thing.

Even if they had targeted the Muslim leadership for cooptation, as was the case decades earlier in Central Asia, or if they attempt to do so in the future to gain a foothold in the intensely religious countryside, Soviet and Afghan policymakers will have to deal with the relatively lower prestige of Muslim leaders in Afghanistan compared with that of the Muslim Spiritual Directorates in the USSR. In Afghanistan, Muslim clerics have neither administrative nor spiritual authority, and their political prises de position in favor of the USSR or the government in Kabul cannot be expected to engage believers beyond themselves. Real spiritual authority in Afghanistan, rather, is vested in several spiritual families believed to have descended directly from the Prophet. The Mojadidi family is one example. In a major miscalculation, the Kabul governments under Taraki and Amin selected

these families for special attention during the days of anti-Islamic fervor. Many members of these families were massacred; others disappeared. Not surprisingly, the survivors are among the most active and respected leaders of the resistance.

Where the Kabul authorities have attempted to create and employ a cadre of "Red Mullahs" of the kind the Soviets cultivated in the 1920s, Mujahidin freedom fighters have shown themselves to be intuitively well versed in this potential threat to their activities. Unlike the Basmachi in Central Asia, Mujahidin guerrillas have employed individual terrorism to great effect, quickly and effectively murdering those Muslim clerics who are so rash as to cooperate with the "godless Communists" and leaving them impaled or disemboweled as an object lesson for those who might be inclined to waver.⁷

Because of the ill-conceived official anti-religious campaign and Mujahidin activities to eliminate Muslim clerics who collaborated, the resistance has been able to capitalize on the Islamic issue as its own. Hence the guerrilla war has acquired the character of a jihad, in which there can be no compromises and no concessions. Aware of this, the government of Babrak Karmal has frantically tried to refurbish its Muslim image. Since April 1980, all official documents have begun with the Muslim formula, "In the name of God the Compassionate and the Merciful." Karmal and his ministers, including those members of the Khalq branch of the Party who were active participants in the anti-

⁷ An AFP dispatch from Islamabad, 28.VIII, 1980, mentions the existence of a "black list of assassination targets" drawn by the Mujahidins in Kabul, containing priority targets for execution. Most of the names on these lists are members of the Parcham.

religious campaign of 1978-79, in the name of "Almighty God," verbally dedicate their efforts to the defense of Islam "threatened by the American and Chinese infidels." They seldom miss religious ceremonies. Members of the official Association of Religious Scholars (Jamiyat ul-Ulama) have begun to participate actively in the official propaganda, regularly touring the religious establishments of Soviet Central Asia at the invitation of the Mufti of Tashkent, Ziauddin Babakhanov. On their return, they obsequiously profess their admiration of the Soviet Union, "the greatest friend of Islam."⁸

Despite considerable evidence to the contrary, Kabul authorities now claim that the new rapprochement with Islam is highly successful and that a growing number of Muslim clerics and believers are supporting the government.⁹ Mahmud Barialay, one of the leaders of the Afghan revolution, gave a more sober and informed assessment of the relationship between Islam and the Kabul government to Radio Budapest in December 1980. Stressing that "the ideology of the Party was opposed to religious ideology" and acknowledging that "during the first phases of the revolution, the leadership [of the Party] was impatient and often had to use force against the religious leaders whom it regarded without exception as being opponents of progress," Mahmud Barialay offered only

⁸ See, for example, Kabul Radio in Dari, 1230 GMT, 6 September 1980, in FBIS-SAS, 80-176, 9 September 1980, where several Afghan mullahs are interviewed on their return from Tashkent, Samarkand, Bukhara, and Namangan. The Jamiyat ul-Ulama, founded in April 1978 in imitation of the Soviet policy, is currently nicknamed by residents of Kabul "Jamivat ol-Johala" (Association of the Ignorants).

⁹ An AFP dispatch from Islamabad, 10 June 1980, in FBIS-SAS, 80-134, 19 August 1980, describes a congress of Afghan clerics organized by the government of Kabul during which a pro-Soviet mullah was interrupted and booed. At another meeting in the Polytechnic Institute of Kabul, several clerics rose to challenge Soviet occupation of Afghanistan.

tentative hope for the future:

We now take reality as our point of departure. The thinking of the predominantly illiterate population is still being formed mainly by the mullahs. We are endeavoring to find a common denominator with the religious leaders, namely those elements of religious teaching that concern the struggle against oppressions and exploitation.¹⁸

It is as yet too early to evaluate the results of this new pro-Islamic strategy and to decide who will win the propaganda war. However, with the Soviet Army occupying the country, official government propaganda denouncing "American imperialists" and "Chinese hegemonists" as the only enemies of Islam must strike most of the "predominantly illiterate population" as a bit far-fetched. Russian infidels who carry weapons and destroy villages can be seen everywhere.

THE MODERN INTELLECTUAL ELITE

In the 1920s, the revolutionary Bolshevik leadership understood that the success of their political program in the borderlands depended to a large extent on their ability to swing the influence of the modern intellectual elite of Soviet Muslim regions to their side. In this they proved very successful and the revolution prospered. Exceptionally sophisticated native intellectuals such as the Kazan Tatars Mir-Said, Sultan Galiev, and Galimjan Ibragimov, the Kazakhs Turar Ryskulov and Ahmed Baytursun, the Uzbeks Abdurrauf Fitrat and Fayzulla Kojaev, and many others went over to the Bolsheviks, either as full members of the Russian Communist Party or as temporary allies. This important group of

¹⁸ Interview by Radio Budapest, in Hungarian, 1730 GMT, 11 December 1980, in FBIS-SAS, 80-241, 12 December 1960.

intellectuals, most of whom were later liquidated by Stalin, played a major role in bridging the gap between the Russian revolutionaries and the Muslim masses. Through their efforts, the gap between traditional Islamic society and Russian socialism was made to appear much smaller than it eventually proved to be, and it was because of this that the Russian reconquest of Central Asia never assumed the character of a colonial enterprise.

In Afghanistan, six decades later, whether through unilateral decisions by Taraki and Amin or as part of a broader Soviet-inspired strategy, what might have been a similar strategic environment has been altered dramatically. Through massacres and forced emigration, Taraki and Amin have all but eliminated Afghanistan's modern, liberal, and westernized intelligentsia. Those who survive and remain in Afghanistan are, for the most part, considered to be politically unreliable; hence, they are shunned from service in the Kabul government. Today, this government is supported primarily by half-educated rural elements.

More recently, Karmal has initiated measures to attract surviving non-Party intellectuals back to state service. For example, in January 1981 he inaugurated a "National Fatherlands Front," a non-Communist organization open to "all honest patriots" but led, of course, by Parchamis. For this and similar endeavors success will come hard, but it is still too early to measure their progress.

IV. CREATE A STRONG PARTY APPARATUS

In February 1917, there were a few Muslim Communists in Russia. Two years later, several thousand former radical Muslim nationalists were admitted to the Russian Communist Party. The new Communist cadre originated in various strictly nationalist parties such as the Young Bukharans, the Alash-Orda (Kazakh), Milli Firka (Crimean Tatar), and Hummet (Azerbaijani).¹ Because they needed these nationalists-turned-Communists to consolidate their revolution, Bolshevik leaders did not object to the non-proletarian origins of the new Muslim adherents. (In fact, nearly all belonged to the nobility or to the upper levels of the bourgeoisie in their respective societies.) Moreover, for a time at least, the Bolsheviks were prepared to suffer the Muslims' not inconsiderable ideological deviations. At the same time, however, the Bolsheviks submitted them to rigid discipline, much as they treated their Russian comrades. These Muslim Communists played prominent roles in local Communist Parties after 1920, when the majority of Russians who

¹ The Young Bukharans were a secret radical reformist society founded in Bukhara in 1909. Many entered the Russian Communist Party in 1921 and 1922 and remained there until their liquidation in the mid-1930s. Alash-Orda, a Kazakh nationalist liberal party, was founded in 1917. Anti-Bolshevik in the beginning, its leaders joined the Reds during the Civil War and were accepted into the Russian Communist Party in 1920. They dominated the Communist Party of Kazakhstan until their purge around 1932. Milli-Firka, a Crimean Tatar radical reformist party, was founded in 1917. The members of its left wing were admitted into the Russian Communist Party in 1920 and were purged between 1924 and 1928. Hummet, a socialist Azeri party of Bolshevik orientation, was founded in 1904. In 1920 it became the basis of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan. In Daghestan, local Muslim Communists formed the majority of the Communist Party until their purge and liquidation in the mid-1930s. We find the same picture in the Tatar and Bashkir republics, where the local Communist Parties were dominated by National Communists until the first arrest of Sultan Galiev in 1923.

had dominated these same Parties during the period of "War Communism" were ousted. Without question, the native Communist cadre saved the revolution in Muslim territories by providing it with a distinctly national profile and by correcting the brutal excesses committed by the Red Army against the local populations during the first three years of Bolshevik rule. Stalin never trusted these Muslim "bourgeois revolutionaries and fellow travelers" and ultimately did away with most of them, but not before they had served his purpose: to secure Russian control of the Communist Party apparatus.

In Afghanistan, today's Soviet leaders similarly are untrusting of "bourgeois revolutionaries"; therefore, they have favored the less intellectual and less independent native elements to spread Russian influence. Both the Khalqis and the Parchamis stand in striking contrast to those Muslims of Russia who joined the Russian Communist Party in 1918-20. Doctrinal independence has eluded them--they have been unable to find their own "Afghan way" to socialism as Russia's Muslim National Communists did in the 1920s--and they have been reduced to accepting the Russian model with few alterations. At the same time, all sides have behaved in the most unruly fashion, for, like all true Afghans, they are allergic to discipline. The bloody feud between the Khalq and the Parcham certainly is not the work of their Soviet sponsors who would prefer the kind of iron discipline their predecessors exercised over Soviet Muslim Communists decades earlier.

After nearly three years of successive Communist regimes in Afghanistan, "Afghan Communism" can be summarized as follows: First, its only real success has been the creation of an effective political

police apparatus (Hedmat-e Ammaniyat-e Dawleti) with many branches, including a recently established section for anti-guerrilla activities.² This development should not strike anyone as odd, as it simply repeats a pattern observable in nearly all other Communist states.

Second, neither the Khalq nor the Parcham faction has been able to establish its authority outside of Kabul. Once again demonstrating their keen awareness of the dangers of being coopted by the Afghan Communists, the Mujahidin have systematically liquidated those revolutionary militants (mostly teachers and members of youth groups) who were sent from the center to spread the Afghan revolution in the countryside.

Third, the ranks of the Afghan Communists are becoming thin, not only as a result of Mujahidin attacks, but also from the internecine warfare between the Khalq and Parcham.

Fourth, a growing number of Khalq and Parcham members are hostile to continued Soviet presence in Afghanistan and are willing to betray their nominal protectors.

Finally, there is no organized political activity to the right of the Parcham, no one to assume the leading role in an eventual transition regime, a role played by the Young Bukharans in Central Asia after 1920 and by the companions of Sultan Galiev in Tatarstan between 1920 and 1923. The Soviets, thus, are stuck with the Khalq and the Parcham, both thoroughly compromised in the eyes of the larger Afghan population.

² AFP dispatch, 22 August 1980, Islamabad, in FBIS-SAS, 80-168, 27 August 1980.

V. FIELD A MUSLIM NATIONAL ARMY

In 1920, approximately 40 percent of the soldiers and officers of Marshall Mikhail Frunze's VIth Red Army were Muslim, mainly Tatars and Bashkirs. The majority came from the "Muslim army" formed in 1917 by the Tatar nationalists of the Harbi Shura,¹ which was disbanded by the Soviets in 1918. These Muslim officers were highly politicized, albeit more nationalist than Communist, having been trained between 1918 and 1920 in special political-military seminars created by Sultan Galiev under the aegis of the new People's Commissariat for Nationalities.² Indifferent to socialist revolution and mainly interested in their own liberation from the reactionary rule of the Emir of Bukhara and from domination by the Russian colonists who had flooded into their native lands, the Muslim units of the VIth Red Army proved to be superb soldiers. Due largely to their presence in the force, the Russian recolonization of Central Asia appeared to be something else entirely; that is, it appeared to be more of a private Muslim affair.

By comparison, the XIth Red Army which invaded Daghestan and Chechna was an all-Russian army, and its campaign became a typical

¹ The Harbi Shura (Military Council) was founded at the Second All-Russian Muslim Congress in Kazan in July 1917. Its military units, composed mainly of Tatars and Bashkirs, remained neutral in the battles of October 1917 between the Reds and the Whites. When they were disbanded in March 1918, a certain number of Muslim officers and soldiers joined the VIth Army. There were two Tatar rifle brigades, two Tatar-Bashkir rifle regiments, and several autonomous battalions.

² Mir Said Sultan Galiev, a Volga Tatar, the principal theoretician of the "Muslim way to Communism," was, in 1918-20, one of Stalin's most trusted lieutenants in the People's Commissariat for Nationalities (Narkomnatz). Among other official positions, he was chairman of the Revolutionary-Military Commission (Revvoenkommissiia) of the Narkomnatz.

colonial war for the Russians and a jihad for the fearsome Caucasian mountaineers who fought to the last man. Where the reconquest of Central Asia, on the whole, was a positive experience, the campaign in the Caucasus was a purely negative one.³ The Daghestani Communist historians who eventually wrote the history of this bloody period drew the necessary conclusions: A war against conservative Muslim insurgents must be conducted by revolutionary Muslim units or, at the very least, with the assistance of such units.⁴

The early Bolshevik thrust has another important dimension that contributed to its success. In Central Asia, but not in the Caucasus, operations consisted primarily of conquering and organizing the territory; much less emphasis was placed on searching out and destroying the rebels. Even when the fighting in Central Asia was conducted by Russian units, pacification and organization of the conquered land was left to Muslim units. In the absence of a local proletariat, Muslim military cadre became the spearhead of the revolution.

Not so in Afghanistan. The Soviet Army that invaded in December 1979 contained a relatively large proportion of Central Asian reservist soldiers, although the officers almost certainly were Slavs. Untrained for serious combat and lacking any strong incentives to fight their co-ethnics and co-religionists in Afghanistan, Soviet Central Asian

³ Daghestan and the Chechen-Ingush republic have remained since this time the most insecure area of USSR. Revolts broke out in Chechnia in 1928, in 1936, and again in 1942-43. According to recent Soviet sources, this region is the bastion of the most intolerant, aggressive, and xenophobic Sufi brotherhoods.

⁴ See Najmuddin Efendiev-Samurskii (First Secretary of the Daghestan Oblast Committee), Daghestan, (Moscow, 1924) and Grazhdanskai Voina v Daghestane (Makhach-Qala, 1925); and A Takho-Godi, Revoliutsiia i Kontrrevoliutsiia v Daghestane (Makhach-Qala, 1927).

soldiers were withdrawn from service beginning in late February 1980 and were replaced by Slavs. Emigre reports and journalistic accounts speak of widespread fraternization between the Soviet Central Asian soldiers and the local inhabitants and of such attendant phenomena as an active black market in Korans. While evidence still is less than comprehensive, it may well be the case that these soldiers acted in such a way as to throw their military and political reliability into doubt.⁵ In any event, most Soviet Central Asians soldiers were removed from Afghanistan before or upon completion of their 90-day reserve duty. Others were mobilized but never sent to Afghanistan. Similarly, Soviet Central Asian non-military advisors, who had been sent to Afghanistan in force many months before the invasion, were withdrawn.

Finally, the Afghan army, in which the Soviets have invested so much, has been unable to pacify or even remotely control the activities of the Muslim guerrillas. Indeed, most of it has disappeared into the hills to join the resistance, a timely and valuable influx of men and weapons for the Mujahidin. Perhaps recognizing that in the long run Soviet forces can never bring a political solution to Afghanistan, the Kabul government has indicated that it wants to build a new Muslim "revolutionary army." Afghan officers are being sent once again to Soviet military schools, where special political courses and seminars have been developed for them.

⁵ S. Enders Wimbush and Alex Alexiev, Soviet Central Asian Soldiers in Afghanistan, The Rand Corporation, N-1634/1, January 1981.

VI. CREATE AN AFGHAN NATIONAL COMMUNISM

Marxism-Leninism promised so much, if only by implication, to so many in 1918 that it could be portrayed without dissent as a conquering ideology. Many Russians welcomed it and fought under its banner for a better and new world, or at least for satisfaction of their grievances against the hated land owners and the exploitative bourgeoisie.

National minorities in the Russian Empire, including Russia's Muslims, also found it convenient to side with the Bolsheviks who espoused this doctrine, for after all, part and parcel of Leninism is the promise of national self-determination. For Muslims, this meant the liberation of the Russian Muslim world. So powerful was the appeal of Bolshevism that converts blindly excused all the "unavoidable errors," tragedies, and brutalities that characterized the new movement from its first breaths. Stalin was later to denounce the perpetration of these "errors" as the work of "leftist deviationists," "Trotskyites," and "traitors," charges that carried the added advantage of allowing the Bolsheviks to eliminate forever some of their most formidable adversaries.

Objectively, the period of "War Communism," with its massacres and "cavalry raids"--brutal attacks by armed bands of Bolsheviks against the Muslim religious establishment--was no more benign than the behavior of the Afghan Communists under Taraki and Amin, but there is a major difference. In Central Asia in the 1920s, the period of terror was followed by a brief but authentic detente promoted by native Communists.

By a series of clever ideological innovations, Communists articulated what has become known as Muslim National Communism: a

synthesis of Marxism, Islam, and nationalism. This loose doctrine inverted many tenets of orthodox Marxism, among other things asserting the primacy of national liberation over social revolution. According to the Muslim National Communists, the cultural and religious bases of native society were to be left largely intact, free from the dogmatic ideological attacks that characterized Russian applications of Marxism-Leninism to their own society. Class war in the Muslim borderlands was to be postponed indefinitely. (In fact, this restriction lasted only until 1928.) Reforms that might antagonize the native populations, such as land reform, destruction of traditional religious education, the confiscation of waqf properties (properties paid to Muslim authorities to support Islamic activities), and, above all, anti-religious campaigns, were put off for the foreseeable future. Local political and economic organs were gradually "nativized," leaving the mistaken impression in the minds of the natives that the Russians were embarked on something more benevolent than colonial reconquest.¹

Purveyors of the revolution in Afghanistan in 1978 ignored these highly successful lessons from the past by launching an all-out effort to break down traditional Muslim society in the most radical fashion. Due to ignorance, bad judgment, or bad advice (but probably as a result of all three), Afghanistan's Soviet-inspired revolutionary leaders foolishly embarked on a purely social revolution with an absurd class war program calling for impossible reforms. Not surprisingly, Babrak Karmal's government is now desperately scrambling to undo the

¹ For a more complete explanation of Muslim National Communism, see Bennisen and Wimbush, chapter 3.

predictable and widespread damage done by the short-lived governments of Taraki and Amin.

Whether or not Babrak Karmal can reverse the trends cannot be ascertained at this early date, but he faces an uphill battle. Again, comparisons with the Soviet struggle in Central Asia are instructive. While native Central Asian Communists were successfully promoting detente in the countryside in the 1920s, the Basmachi movement already was at an ebb. In Afghanistan in 1981, the rebels are stronger than they were one year ago, forcing Karmal to liberalize his regime while simultaneously adopting systematic terrorism. Where Central Asia embarked on "nativization," Karmal must rely on the presence of the Soviet army and Soviet advisors, thereby obviating any inclination he might have to pursue policies that might give his regime a national Muslim face.²

Where the Soviets were able to harness Muslim National Communism in Central Asia to their own ends, Karmal's regime has been unable to find an "Afghan way to socialism" and is continuing to imitate the Russian--not the Central Asian--model, which is completely inappropriate to Afghan conditions. Furthermore, Karmal's claim to lead a national liberation movement cannot be taken seriously, for no one in Afghanistan is likely to believe that at this time in history Afghanistan is defending herself against the invasion of American, Pakistani, or Chinese imperialists. Finally, where the Muslim National Communists in

² A joke floating around Kabul in October 1980: A Parchami to a Khalqi: "You have dishonored our history [as a result of Amin's brutality]"; the Khalqi to the Parchami: "And you have dishonored our geography [by inviting in the Russians]."

Central Asia were able to implement or stop political, economic, and social reforms in accordance with the native society's immediate wishes, Karmal has no such latitude. Simply, the authority of his government extends no farther than the suburbs of Kabul.

VII. CONCLUSIONS

In an excellent article in Problems of Communism,¹ Zalmay Khalilzad argues that the success or failure of Soviet intervention in Afghanistan depends on five factors:

1. Pakistan's policy toward the resistance.
2. The extent of external support for the Mujahidin.
3. The success or failure of Soviet attempts to convert division among the insurgents into open conflict.
4. Soviet efforts to establish a government in Kabul which commands a large armed force and has a wide base of support.
5. The scope and duration of the Soviet military commitment.

If we consider the Soviet experiences with Muslim guerrilla war in Central Asia and the North Caucasus, these five factors can be sharpened by three additional conditions whose successful creation would seem to bear heavily on the Soviet prospects for success in Afghanistan.

First, Soviet leaders must create as rapidly as possible a disciplined, unified, and dedicated Communist Party apparatus whose members can function as effective political cadre, not simply as killers and policemen. Second, Afghan Communist leaders must develop an acceptable theory of Afghan national Communism. Third, a competent and reliable Afghan army must be returned to the field.

¹ Zalmay Khalilzad, "Soviet Occupied Afghanistan," Problems of Communism (November-December 1980), pp. 23-40.

To these three "lessons" from an earlier time can be added the following precondition: All Soviet troops and advisors must be withdrawn from Afghanistan, for no Afghan government is likely to be accepted by the population while Russian soldiers can be seen in every city and on every highway. Even a radical digression from Communist rule--a highly unlikely event--probably would fail if undertaken with Soviet patronage. In May 1980, one of the many rumors circulating in Kabul concerned the Soviets returning King Zaher Shah to the throne. The typical Afghan response to this possibility is best captured in a current joke: "Even if the Prophet Mohammed himself comes out of the Russian embassy and asks, 'Would you accept me?', people would answer no."